

William Lloyd Garrison on Woman Suffrage (1)
~~Woman Suffrage at the State House~~

William Lloyd Garrison addressed the following letter to Senator George D. Robinson a few days ago. It will be of interest in view of the debate on the Constitutional Amendment which occurs today in the House of Representatives.

March 14 1876

Hon. George D. Robinson:

Dear Sir— I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, but I take the liberty of addressing you by letter for two reasons:— (1) because of the profound interest I take in the question of impartial suffrage, irrespective of sex; and (2) because in your adverse speech in the Senate Chamber, as reported in the Woman's Journal, ~~of the day~~, you did me the honor to refer to me in connection with two others, as follows:—

"Did Charles Sumner influence by his vote? Did Wendell Phillips, when he refused to vote? Did Garrison, who never voted? Was it his ballot or his voice that went forth in thunder tones? It was the manliness, the indomitable spirit of these men that told."

With all due respect, allow me to say that I do not see any pertinency
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in these references; for, certainly, you did not mean to imply that, because of the powerful influence thus attributed to the individuals named, (and very many others that might have been named,) they ought to be deprived of the ballot, or at least to regard it as of no consequence in their own case! And if you did not mean this, how does it logically follow that you can with propriety or consistency "take the hands of your sisters who desire to obtain equality, and say: 'Go on; you do not need the ballot'?"

Lucus a non lucendo. When was it ever dreamed ~~of~~ that, just in proportion as men became enlightened and potential in moral force, they should be told that they have no need of the elective franchise; or that because, in rare instances, some of that class - for reasons satisfactory to themselves - refrain from voting, therefore a sweeping proscription should be made of all male voters?

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But the reasoning is as applicable to all men as to all women.

If I do not vote, it is not because I am disfranchised by the State. If I were, by an invidious distinction, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts would be speedily hear from me. My liberty is not impaired but asserted when I do as I please on election-days.

You declare that your mother and wife say to you, "Protect us from Suffrage." If they do so, they may live to ~~be~~ ^{marvel} ~~at~~ that they ever gave advice, which, politically, leaves them in the category of paupers, felons, lunatics, and idiots. If they do so, it does not follow that you should give heed to their wishes. ~~It does not follow that you should give heed to their wishes.~~ If they do so, the absurdity of it is none the less ludicrous; for if the franchise be granted, your wife and mother may voluntarily keep as far from the ballot-box as they are now compelled to by mas-

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culine egotism and usurpation. On the other hand, there are thousands of mothers and wives who as earnestly say to the Legislature, "Give us the protection of Suffrage." Why should not their wishes be granted?

But my object is not to analyze your speech, made apparently in sincerity, but to call your attention to the following passage in it: — "A Constitutional Amendment is the only way in which this question can be fairly met, or in which ~~the people~~ ^{the people} ~~can be fairly~~ should be asked to meet it." Well, for such an Amendment a considerable portion of the intelligent, virtuous and educated women of Massachusetts have, year after year, with increasing numbers, been petitioning the Legislature, and thus far only to have their petitions contemptuously thrown back into their faces. On Wednesday next such an Amendment is to receive the consideration of the Senate. Is it not time to have it submitted to the voters of the Commonwealth, that they may have an opportunity to decide the matter? Professing to believe that it would be overwhelmingly voted down, you can have no fears as to the result. As no Senator, voting to submit it to those who constitute the governing element, will thereby be precluded from opposing it at the polls, I hope to see your vote in favor of a trial. Respectfully yours, Wm. Lloyd Garrison

Roxbury March 14. 1876